

Lights and Shadows

Volume 16 *Lights and Shadows* Volume 16

Article 15

1972

Pathways

Dale Jackson

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ir.una.edu/lightsandshadows>



Part of the [Nonfiction Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Jackson, D. (1972). Pathways. *Lights and Shadows*, 16 (1). Retrieved from <https://ir.una.edu/lightsandshadows/vol16/iss1/15>

This Prose is brought to you for free and open access by UNA Scholarly Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Lights and Shadows by an authorized editor of UNA Scholarly Repository. For more information, please contact jpate1@una.edu.

PATHWAYS

Our footsteps fall on pathways that are characterized by appearances and immediate destinations. Whether the use of these walkways has been reduced by transportation to merely the one that leads to the home from the automobile, or is as vast as those traveled by one whose chief mode of travel is walking, they each have significant individual characteristics. We observe these characteristics and we classify them, consciously or unconsciously, cataloguing them by our emotions and responses, with each division unique and different.

The most often frequented path of travel by foot is the familiar maze of sidewalks that divide cities into aerial squares. Statistics on this assumption would certainly prove it to be correct. Automobiles are parked in the heart of the city or on many surrounding blocks with sidewalks supplying easy access to stores and houses. To lump all of these sidewalks into the same category, however, would be incorrect and unfair. Therefore, we differentiate between the many types of sidewalks that hold the cities and adjoining neighborhoods together as if they were caught in the grasp of a huge web.

The city's streets extend up to the very entrance of streamlined buildings by easily accessible and perfectly formed sheets of concrete. These extensions differ markedly from the tree-root buckled slabs of chipped stone that line the adjacent streets in the older parts of the city and neighborhood. The walkway's perfect smoothness is the result of the same constantly advancing technology that creates the multi-storied buildings that pierce the skys of modern cities. When a prize location in the heart of a busy downtown business district commands rent as high as the buildings themselves, a regular walkway wouldn't match the resultant grandeur. Accordingly, a high-grade sidewalk of polished marble-like stone is constructed. These elaborate, often beautiful, walks epitomize the hurried

formality of the activities that are carried on around them. A traveller of these paths finds varied ends as his destination. Included may be awesome department stores, plush banks and office buildings, theaters, and museums. Feet clad in the fashion-conscious style of the modern businessman, as well as those in wear-toughened leather boots of the common laborer tread these walkways. Included in the varied range between either type, are motives and destinations containing unifying characteristics. Each ultimately leads to a formalized nature of being among people of diverse interests and goals. The business appointment, the meeting, shopping, and even enjoyment of a movie are carried on in an aura of formality. These hurried appointments take the form of a farmer going to the bank for a loan, a banker going to work, a tourist in a museum, or a lady shopping in the places of latest fashion. People from all the many walks of life do, indeed, come together in the noisy atmosphere of mortar and steel. All use the easy access provided by sidewalks, whether they are the people who thrive on other's woes, or dwindle on the services offered.

Some people who use these pathways sometimes prefer to call them "treadmills." For obvious and often justifiable reasons, they fail to see the beauty of the polished stone of which they are composed. Instead, they are distracted by the hurry and rush and by the dread of their anticipated rendezvous.

Just as the large ultra-modern buildings have their matching sidewalks and their corresponding connotations for travellers, so do the accompanying older buildings and their walkways. These pedestrian byways are as striking in contrast as the buildings themselves. Marble and architecture fades into the mortar with immaculate sidewalks tapering into irregular paths of illuminated halves and sections of gravel sunken into concrete. The modern

sits in seemingly uneasy arrogant suspicion and noisy dominance, while the old meditates in an air of authority and respect. The modern, though casting a weary eye, rests content in the prophetic time-proven knowledge that the old eventually gives way to the new.

Although these speculations and musings may be vaguely recognized by many of the travellers of sidewalks, usually, other considerations are more common. The older, delapidated lines along the tree-lined streets more often prompt thoughts about their quaintness and familiarity. These sidewalks, in all of their ruddy countenance and need of repair, usually lead to familiar and welcome places such as the corner market, homes of friends, and home itself. Any attention paid to these often taken-for-granted paths can't fail to recognize the unusual physical appearance of the walks themselves. Each street has different sidewalks, each assuming a separate character and personality of its own. The one-time delicate cracks between the sections of concrete become constantly expanded by stubble grass and time. In some sections, staunch roots of nearby oak and maple trees create networks of cracks that conjure images of small earthquakes in the mind of the conscientious observer. Still, in other sections, the sidewalks buckle to form tiny A-frame houses for the various insects that seek shelter and food in the newly unearthed dampness.

A walk down these paths creates a hazard of stumbling blocks for a stranger, but each crack and fault guides the familiar foot as if they were markings on a map. These familiar paths lead to familiar destinations with fond hopes and desires. Their use may include a path to and from school, a few steps to and from the home to the automobile, or a sidewalk to town.

Thoughts of what to pick up at the grocery store, or what's for dinner tonight may casually wander in and out of the mind of the purveyor of these routes. If the day is particularly beautiful, a walk with a friend may be inspired. In this instance, feet fall confidently on personal by-ways with no concerted destination other than the search for a breath of fresh air, or a meeting with a common mind. Along its illustrious course, a walk eventually leads back to the same point of departure. A feeling of contentment and a slight wonder about the author of the initials at the end of the sidewalk signed in the year 1917, provides accompaniment.

Finally, footsteps may fall on paths that have no obvious gratification in comparison to others. The reason being that these paths are used almost exclusively for the enjoyment of relaxation and peacefulness they provide. Scenic trails in a National Park, less travelled ones in a particular favorite spot in the forest, or any path of uncertain destination is a total lack of formality. They may be crude trails etched by the accustomed travel of animals, or they may be in the form of a path covered with thousands of pieces of loose slag.

Trailways such as these obviously differ greatly from the modern city sidewalks in their superficial characteristics. However, they are similar in that they, too, ultimately lead to some destination. The destination is motivated by the great dissimilarity between the different walkways. This explains why people feel they must "get away" for an afternoon, or several days to wander around in a forest or a park. It is the desire to see nature in its unprostituted form. The concrete of the city streets, even if lined with the most natural arrangement of trees and grass can't match the soft assuring comfort of the feel of the earth and leaves underfoot. The

elaborate formations of the city dull the feet and wear soles thin after constant, perpetual treading. A walk in the woods along paths lets the feet breathe once again and feel as if they were actually alive and part of the natural order and beauty. It is an inviting and welcome relief.

In an age when concrete seems to multiply like cancerous blights, people continually seek refuge among places that can only be approached by intimate paths of natural origin. The reasoning in the person assumes the form of a desire to spend some time with the family on a picnic or scenic walk. This reasoning originates, however, in an irrepressible longing to mingle in pleasant relationships with the trees, fields and streams. The persistent urge to commune with nature becomes a method of intense search, rather than playful escape. A search for the answers to questions that lie deep within the soul often evokes thoughts and questions about lives and the way they are spent. It may very often lead to ever-present, often-dormant questions about the basic temperament of man---Is man better suited for an environment of concrete and stone or is a more equal division with nature a more nerve-soothing compromise?

After the return home, these thoughts may be carried over as footsteps fall on the familiar breaks in the sidewalk. A fleeting moment of thought may be centered on the belief of the man who said that without interference natural growth would topple man-made structures in a relatively short period of time. This thought becomes pleasantly intensified by the roots of the giant oak tree that have compressed the wedge of earth tighter against the expanse of broken concrete in the sidewalk formed 55 years ago by a now-forgotten cement-mixer.

elaborate formations of the city dull the feet and wear soles thin after constant, perpetual treading. A walk in the woods along paths lets the feet breathe once again and feel as if they were actually alive and part of the natural order and beauty. It is an inviting and welcome relief.

In an age when concrete seems to multiply like cancerous blights, people continually seek refuge among places that can only be approached by intimate paths of natural origin. The reasoning in the person assumes the form of a desire to spend some time with the family on a picnic or scenic walk. This reasoning originates, however, in an irrepressible longing to mingle in pleasant relationships with the trees, fields and streams. The persistent urge to commune with nature becomes a method of intense search, rather than playful escape. A search for the answers to questions that lie deep within the soul often evokes thoughts and questions about lives and the way they are spent. It may very often lead to ever-present, often-dormant questions about the basic temperament of man---Is man better suited for an environment of concrete and stone or is a more equal division with nature a more nerve-soothing compromise?

After the return home, these thoughts may be carried over as footsteps fall on the familiar breaks in the sidewalk. A fleeting moment of thought may be centered on the belief of the man who said that without interference natural growth would topple man-made structures in a relatively short period of time. This thought becomes pleasantly intensified by the roots of the giant oak tree that have compressed the wedge of earth tighter against the expanse of broken concrete in the sidewalk formed 55 years ago by a now-forgotten cement-mixer.